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ABSTRACT

Secondary school teachers can present the process of writing compositions simply and effectively by adopting three tools: the positive approach, the easy three-step analysis process, and the brainstorm outline. Using the positive approach, teachers first convince students that writing effectively is important to them--it gives them the power to think more clearly and to influence others' thinking. Next, teachers generate a positive learning atmosphere, helping students to feel good about their writing. Then teachers explain the three-step analysis process--make a statement, give examples, and explain proofs--and show how this process can be applied to a simple assignment, such as analyzing how commercials use gimmicks to sell products. By adapting the brainstorm outline to their topics, teachers help students generate new ideas. (A model of a brainstorm outline and sample applications of the analysis process to literature are appended.) (MM)

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TEACHING WRITING EASILY AND EFFECTIVELY TO GET RESULTS

Part I

The Analysis Approach, A Model

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TEACHING WRITING EASILY AND EFFECTIVELY TO GET RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

I get tired of hearing college people say that high school kids don't know how to write compositions when they get to college. I read in magazines and newspapers similar stories and this distresses me. I have even heard ugly reports from educators and students alike from various schools that most English teachers don't teach composition very much if at all, which was hard to believe, until I had the opportunity to observe curriculum, talk with teachers and students alike at various schools--large and small--and I found out that, in many cases, it's true!!!! After observing one English class, when I went up to the teacher and asked, "Do you teach composition?" she answered, "You know I really love grammar." Later she revealed to me that she knew what she wanted to write in her mind, but she didn't know how to put a model of how to write one on the board. (!) I'm not even sure composition is stressed in the curriculum except in one college prep class. All the others were under the heading: "If you have time, teach composition," or, "Emphasize the need for teaching composition."

We are in the business of teaching young people the power of writing, and yet most of us only teach grammar and literature. Why don't more teachers teach comp? ...Because it's too hard to teach the thought processes, and it's too time-consuming to grade the papers.

WRONG. I can show you a simple method of teaching the process of writing compositions even on the highest levels of Bloom's Taxonomy by discussing these three areas:

1. POSITIVE APPROACH
2. EASY 3--STEP ANALYSIS PROCESS
3. MODEL OF BRAINSTORM OUTLINE (with extensions and applications)

POSITIVE APPROACH

Students need to have a goal. They need to know what it is they're learning and why they're learning it. Tell them that learning to write compositions is important to them for 2 reasons:

1. It means POWER--power to influence-even manipulate others so the writers can get what they want.
2. It means developing thinking processes--(More power: you want the family car on Friday night? Analyzing, symthesizing, and evaluation will help you.)

Once you have established the reasons why learning to write compositions is important, the next step is to make sure there is a positive learning atmosphere. Here are three basic rules:

1. Help students feel good about themselves. When you give respect to them, they will return it.
2. Positive reinforcement as often as possible. ("That's a good question. I'm glad you asked that.")
3. NO NEGATIVES in class, either teacher-to-student, student-to-teacher, or student-to-student.

If students feel good about themselves and are confortable, they'll want to learn.

When assignment time approaches, here is a 4th rule for the teacher: Make sure the students know what is expected of them before the assignment.

This is the time to pass out and explain the grading criteria for evaluating the papers. Students need to know exactly what it is you expect them to accomplish. Here also is a good time for a quick review of the use of grammar as it relates to composition and other helpful devices. Pass out grade/evaluation criteria sheets, a list of transitional devices that comes in handy, outline forms, and any other materials.

EASY 3--STEP ANALYSIS PROCESS

Now for the composition assignment: If there is an analysis to be written, have students define analysis--a breaking down of something and looking at its parts. Then teach them the EASY 3--STEP ANALYSIS PROCESS:

1. Make a STATEMENT about the thing you're going to analyze.
2. Give EXAMPLES (quoted areas if from a piece of literature).
3. Explain PROOFS (explain how examples prove statement).

This simple process works for everyone--the "non-learner" as well as the highest achiever.

Once you teach the powers of analysis, you have the students put it into practice. I have chosen a simple analysis assignment which all students can relate to: a T.V. commercial or a magazine ad. Here's the assignment: Ask the students to analyze how a commercial's advertisers use gimmicks to sell their product to the consumer. (This may be a 5-paragraph paper.)

Here's how to go about it in 10 steps. (Task analysis)

1. Students pick a commercial (T.V. or magazine ad.)
2. Brainstorm types of gimmicks used in a commercial:
   A. Music

B. People (their looks and actions)

C. Setting

D. Slogan (catchy tune, catchy words?)

E. Use of colors (moods?)

F. Humor

G. Special effects

H. Others

3. Choose 3 of these gimmicks. (Statement idea)
4. Breakdown each of these into three sub sections. (What about them? Describe them.)
5. Explain what psychological message people subconsciously get. (proofs)

*(At this point students write a BRAINSTORM OUTLINE. For a model of this outline, see Exhibit A.)

6. Now have students write an introductory paragraph which includes a "general" and "transitional" sentence to precede the thesis statement they already created. A simple one like this may be sufficient:

> There are many commercials on television today which try to influence the public. The W____ Jeans commercial is one of these. This commercial's advertisers uses various gimmicks such as music, setting, and characters to persuade people to buy their product.

7. Now make each of the "brainstorm-outline" ideas into sentences. These will go into the 3 "body" paragraphs. (Use transitions wherever needed within and between paragraphs, and insert paragraph conclusion reiterating thesis.)
8. Write conclusion (5th paragraph).
9. Proof read rough draft; revise; write final draft.
10. Proof read/evaluate final draft.

CONCLUSION

The beauty of teaching the process of analysis is that this knowledge can be transferred to other areas of study from the study of literature to any form of writing across the curriculum. This not only gives the students the ability to think clearly, but it helps give powerful validity for their points of view while they develop more confidence in their ability to communicate effectively with the world around them.

MODEL OF BRAINSTORM OUTLINE

I. Introduction with thesis statement: The producers of the W____ Jeans commercial use gimmicks such as music, setting, and characters to persuade the public to buy their product.

II. Music (paragraph topic sentence statement)

A. Western theme

1. Appeals to western music lovers (example)
2. Psychological message relates to western scene and tough cowboys (proof)

B. Slogan

1. "Here comes W____. He's one tough customer. (example)
2. Psychological message: "Gee, if I wear W____, I can be tough too!" (proof)

C. Catchy tune "stamps" on mind (example)
(Every time you hear the music, you think of W____ jeans.)
(proof)

III. Setting (statement)

A. West

1. Rugged, "free," unsettled, etc. (example)
2. Appeals to people's yearning for the "good ol' open spaces" (proof)

B. Cattle heard (example) helps people relate to cowboy atmosphere, ridin' the range, ropin' cattle...(proof)

C. Colors

1. Earth tones--"warm" colors (example)
2. Warm, secure feeling amid excitement of open range (proof)

IV. Characters (statement)

A. "Beautiful people" (example)
Psychological message: "If I wear W____ jeans, I can be a 'beautiful person' too.") (proof)

B. Man

1. "Macho," handsome, well-portioned, and gets his girl (example)
2. Message: "If I wear W____ jeans, I can be macho and get the girl of my dreams, too." (proof)

C. Girl

1. Radiantly healthy, tanned, slim-trim figure with cute little rear (example)
2. Message to girls: "Gee, if I wear W____ jeans, I'll look petite as I get approval from my man!" (proof)

V. Conclusion

EXTENSIONS AND APPLICATIONS

If you find that you want to teach composition on higher levels of thinking (i.e., Bloom's Taxonomy), here are possible applications of the same assignment on different levels:

SYNTHESIS LEVEL

Assignment: Create your own commercial to sell a product (used sneakers, a pair of shoe laces, "U-Smellum" mouthwash, etc.)

How to do it (Task analysis)

1. Understand how to analyze an existing commercial to transfer this knowledge to hypothetical commercial.
2. Brainstorm "gimmicks" to use.
3. Set up a hypothetical situation where you (student) have to present this written proposal (your creative composition) to the advertising manager of your product's company.
4. This paper may be written with the use of first person "I, we," etc.
5. Follow the basic 10-step format previously mentioned for a finished product.

EVALUATION LEVEL

Change the thesis to form an opinion or make a judgement about advertising agencies. (An example of a workable thesis might be this: The advertisers of the _____ commercial prey unfairly on unsuspecting consumers by using psychological gimmicks of _____, _____, and _____, to get people to buy their products.)

How to do it (Task analysis)

1. Follow the same basic steps for writing an analysis.
2. Make value judgements throughout the paper: intro., body paragraph conclusions, and final concluding paragraph.

APPLICATION TO LITERATURE

Once the simple 3-step analysis process is learned, it can be applied to the study of literature. Here are a few examples of such composition/essay assignments:

Analysis of Author's Style

After reading several works by one author, analyze the author's style by citing specific examples of 1.) sentence length (short? long? a variety of both?); 2.) word choice to set mood or tone; 3.) choice of character traits (nationality, socio-economic background, etc.); and 4.) geographic regions that seem to be predominant.

Analysis of Theme

Analyze the theme of a story by making a statement about it and citing specific places in the story where the theme is revealed.

Analysis of Characters

Romeo and Juliet

I. Analyze how Juliet's character changes throughout the play, citing specific places where she develops from a dependent girl to an independent adult who makes her own choices.

II. Evaluate the family feud which takes place between the Capulets and the Montagues: Is it realistic? Is it possible that feuds between families can exist today for one reason or another? Are they justified?

Macbeth

I. Trace the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth throughout the play: What is each character like at the beginning? Cite specific places in the play where each personality change occurs up to and including the end.

Things to think about:

1. Does one character start out "weak" but become "strong" in the end, while the exact opposite is true of the spouse?
2. What makes a character "weak" or "strong" anyway?
3. Is one's weakness another's strength?

II. Evaluate Macbeth's "Tomorrow" speech for philosophical meaning: Is it a reasonable philosophy toward life? Why or why not?

Task analysis for student:

1. Recall "Tomorrow" speech.
2. Understand what speech means.
3. Analyze each thought in it.
4. Apply it to student's own viewpoint.
5. Students make a value judgement whether or not the philosophy is appropriate for their own individual outlook on life.

A Tale of Two Cities

Analyze how Sidney Carton's character changes from beginning to end of the story by dealing with this question: Does Sidney Carton redeem himself at the end?

Julius Caesar

I. Analyze the tragic flaw in each of the following characters and explain how each person's tragic flaw brings about his own destruction.

a.) Julius Caesar b.) Marcus Brutus c.) Cassius

II. Discuss different places in the play where people con other people by manipulating them through uses of flattery and deceit.

Task Analysis

1. Recall Cassius' con of Brutus, appealing to his naive sense of honor.
2. Recall Cassius' con of Caesar, playing on his vanity.
3. Recall Antony's con of the masses during his funeral speech.

To Kill a Mockingbird

I. Analyze one of the characters of To Kill a Mockingbird by stating what type of person he/she is, citing specific examples from the story to prove your point(s).

II. Discuss life in the "typical" Southern town of Maycomb according to various descriptions given in To Kill a Mockingbird.

III. Analyze how Jem & Scout grow up from being naive children to more understanding people who have learned to "walk in another's shoes." Cite specific examples where these changes occur.